

## **“You’ve Always Got Challenges”: Resilience and the Preservice Teacher**

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### **Abstract**

*Agricultural educators hold a position that bears much responsibility to many different stakeholders and is accompanied by many forms of stressors, making a high level of resilience particularly essential to this group (Anderson, Kitchel, & Thieman, 2012; Croom, 2003; Straquadine, 1990; Torres, Lambert, & Lawver, 2009; Walker, Garton, & Kitchel, 2004). Agricultural educators continue to be in short supply in relation to demand and especially in the early years high attrition rates plague the profession (Kantrovich, 2007). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe teacher resilience of preservice high school agricultural educators. The population studied was ten pre-service agricultural education teachers in their last year of coursework in agricultural education at the University of Missouri. The themes exposed include: youth experiences are a key component toward reflection on resilience, the uncertainty of the reality of the job could counter resilience, and belief that “doing a good job” is key to resilience in teaching. Recommendations for practice and theoretical questions for teacher educators to discuss are provided.*

**Keywords:** resilience; preservice teachers; agricultural education; student teachers

Agricultural educators hold positions bearing much responsibility and answering to many different stakeholders, making a high level of resilience particularly essential to this group as stress can easily become a daily occurrence (Anderson et al., 2012; Croom, 2003; Straquadine, 1990; Torres, Lambert, et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2004). Resilience is a key factor in keeping young teachers in the profession. Higher levels of resilience endow teachers with the cognitive and physical energy reserves to cope with stressors in an effective manner. Effective coping will lead to more efficacious teachers with satisfying professional and personal lives. Increased resilience can lead to more positive student outcomes (Masten, 2001; Sapolsky, 2004b; Thieman, Ball, & Kitchel, 2012).

A strong literature base exists on the self-reported stress levels and stressors of teachers (Kyriacou, 2003); yet agricultural educators continue to be in short supply in relation to demand and especially in the early years of service high attrition rates plague the profession (Kantrovich, 2007). Through study of preservice teacher resilience, those involved with teacher education and development can work toward programming to develop and promote resilience in neophyte teachers. Examination of resilience in preservice teachers is essential to a deeper understanding of teacher development toward resilient and effective professionals.

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## Review of Literature

Adversity leading to stress has tangible and measurable effects on a human being from the time of conception until death. Throughout childhood and adolescence, potentially traumatic and stressful experiences arise as a function of the environment and family context, which have an effect on the development of an individual (Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, & Byers, 2006). In the 1970's, psychologists and therapists began observing children faced with genetic and experiential adversity overcoming the odds to find success in adulthood—a phenomenon labeled as *resilience*. Bandura (1997) described instances where children growing up in chronic poverty, victims of many forms of abuse, poor parenting, and mental disorders somehow manage to overcome these factors to become socially competent, academically achieving, and fulfilled adults contributing positively to society. These observations drew the interest of researchers, whose investigations have produced much data as well as many models and methods about the phenomenon of resilience (Masten, 2001).

The world related to education is changing at a more rapid rate than ever before with advances in technology and information access that are greatly impacting ways of knowing and learning. Teacher educators are tasked with the large duty of preparing teachers for a very different world than the one they were prepared for (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). In addition to larger societal changes, funding structures and oversight or evaluation programs of public schools and teachers have seen great change. Teachers are increasingly expected to do more with less as the general public and media are clamoring for higher student performance while national and state level funding cuts are observed on a regular basis (Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001; Bobek, 2002; Cruickshank et al., 1996; Kyriacou, 2003).

Within education, many factors have a cumulative effect on teacher stress, which can then be exacerbated by stressful experiences within the context of a teacher's personal life (Schroeder, 2006; Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Torres, Lawver, & Lambert, 2009; Wattoo et al., 2009; Yoon, 2002). Individual stress can result in negative health outcomes, reduced job performance, and an undesirable effect on organizational health (Mulder et al., 2002; Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011; Rieg, Paquette, & Y., 2007; Sabanci, 2011; Sapolsky, 2004a). This phenomenon drew the interest of researchers, whose investigations have produced much data as well as many models and methods about resilience (Masten, 2001). Resilience, as found within the structure of positive psychology, is increasingly being used as a framework to examine educator stress (Bobek, 2002; Brunetti, 2006; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004).

Resilience, or the ability to bounce back when faced with adversity, is found to be developed and strengthened as a function of surviving past adverse experiences (Masten, 2001). Through these experiences, one develops and strengthens the tools and coping mechanisms to work through difficult situations (Brunetti, 2006; Masten, 2001). Application of a resilience framework to agricultural education has the potential to positively influence many aspects of the profession from retention rates to quality of life for professionals (Thieman et al., 2012).

## Framework

The study of resilience has a theoretical base in positive psychology, which focuses on the positive attributes and potential, rather than the negative aspects of an individual (Snyder & Lopez, 2009). Two theoretical approaches to teacher resilience have been defined. Gu and Day (2007) describe a multidimensional approach in which personal and environmental factors merge to compose teacher resilience. Patterson, Collins, and Abbot (2004) describe a strategic approach in which teacher resilience is a process of adaptation in which different strategies are engaged. Castro et al. (2010) adopted a position utilizing aspects from both the multidimensional approach and the strategy approach. They identified teachers as "active agents, adopting various strategies to find balance and achievement in the face of adversity, often caused by minimal resources and

challenging working conditions” (Castro et al., 2010, p. 623). The latter is the base that serves to bracket the current study. Researchers applied the active agent model of teacher resilience to the study of preservice agricultural educators through the design and data analysis. Implicit to the development of questions and in the meaning making of the findings was the concept of preservice teachers working against challenges of the profession to cope in the best possible manner.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to characterize teacher resilience of preservice high school agriculture educators. The goal of a phenomenology is to describe a phenomenon through the lived experiences of persons involved in the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). The central question around which the research questions were developed for this study was, “What resilience characteristics do preservice teachers exhibit?” This study is part of a larger design, which focused around the question, “What does resilience look like in novice teachers?”

The following research questions guided design, data collection, and analysis for this study:

- 1) How does the motivation for becoming a teacher relate to resilience of the preservice teacher?
- 2) What qualities of resilience do emerging/pre-service teachers perceive they possess and how might this impact their performance?
- 3) What questions/thoughts do preservice teachers have about the upcoming school year relating to coping and stress?
- 4) What resilience strategies (support, problem-solving, positive relationships, seeking rejuvenation/renewal) do the preservice teachers use?

### **Methods**

The population of the study was preservice teachers ( $N = 16$ ,  $n = 10$ ), five female and five male, scheduled to enter student teaching internship in Spring 2011. A sample of ten students were selected in an effort to maintain even distribution between genders. The Spring 2011 cohort had only five males, so all were selected for the sample. Five female students were chosen through random sampling to compliment the number of male participants. All participants were traditional college students; most were former FFA members from traditional, rural high school agriculture programs. All participants were from the state of Missouri. Almost half entered the University of Missouri with a major other than Agricultural Education, from a variety of majors ranging from agricultural systems management to middle school science, and all participants were able to achieve certification at the end of four years of study.

This study was comprised of preservice teachers who received their teacher preparation from the University of Missouri and are trained exclusively as agricultural education secondary teachers. The agricultural education program at the University of Missouri is a traditional 4-year bachelor's type program utilizing the modal curriculum model of teacher development in agricultural education. Therefore, this study cannot to be generalized beyond the participants; however, this method of participant selection will provide valuable information for the teacher educators of this institution and those following similar models.

To ensure rigor of qualitative research methodology, the study was designed to utilize triangulation through collection of multiple data sources. Qualitative data were collected from multiple sources including: transcriptions from one interview, one journal, and field notes from the interview. While the preservice teachers were completing a course on teaching methodology the semester before student teaching, one round of interviews was completed. Participants were given a \$10 gift card for completing the interview. Semi-structured interviews were used wherein participants were asked to answer questions relating to strategies used when working through a

difficult situation after identifying and describing a difficult situation from their past. The preservice teachers additionally completed a reflection journal with open-ended questions in the first week of the Fall 2011 semester. These questions sought to examine the preservice teachers' perceptions of student teaching and concerns related to the upcoming student teaching experience. Several experts in teacher education outside of the field of agricultural education who also had expertise in resilience studies of educators examined validity of the semi-structured interview questions and reflection journals.

In data analysis, researchers first discussed the conceptual and theoretical frameworks to clarify the drive of the study of educator resilience and the preservice teachers being active agents of resilience in their specific contexts. Two researchers independently completed initial coding of interview transcriptions, reflective journals, and field notes using the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2007). Initial codes were reconciled between researchers and then grouped codes into emergent themes. Finally, themes were distilled to form the final themes and recoded accordingly.

In reporting of data, identifiers beyond gender were removed from the data set in accordance with IRB requirements due to the nature of the questions being asked and the sample size. Participants were being asked to speak on a very personal and emotional topic when answering questions related to their personal challenges and life experiences. This emotion was very evident in the interview process with several participants needing to pause the interview while they recovered from tears brought on by recollections of challenging times in their youth. Participants were additionally asked to speak about concerns related to the upcoming student teaching experience, with that being an evaluated process, it was requested by IRB for data to be stripped of identifying characteristics. This would include corroborating unique experiences of the participants and gender.

Trustworthiness was established using recommendations from Creswell (2007) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) through triangulation of data sources. The use of multiple investigators provided consensual validation of the analysis through a process in which each investigator developed emergent themes individually followed with the merging of findings to the satisfaction of all investigators. Participants were asked to review the findings in an effort to provide confirmability and dependability.

As former secondary agricultural educators, researchers drew upon prior experiences when formulating thoughts regarding teacher resilience. A critical pragmatist approach to research was the epistemological lens used by the primary investigator. This lens holds an underlying assumption that pre-service teacher education could always be improved. Therefore interpretations was viewed as looking toward improvement of teacher preparation programs through the analysis and summary of findings.

## Findings

For the first round of interviews, seven concepts initially emerged from the coding and were subsequently grouped into the three final themes of the findings. The emergent concepts broach each individual's intentions, ambitions, and concerns for their student teaching experience. These concepts include: respect and trust relationships, youth/adolescent experience relevant to the profession, work ethic, creating the teaching and learning environment, creation of self and identity, perspective on the profession, and uncertainty of future. These concepts were aggregated to form the following three themes: *youth experiences are a key component toward reflection on resilience*, *the uncertainty of the reality of the job could counter resilience*, and *belief that "doing a good job" is key to resilience in teaching*.

## **Youth experiences are a key component of reflection on resilience**

The first theme addresses research questions one and two relating to motivation for becoming a teacher and qualities of resilience possessed by the preservice teachers. Teaching high school agriculture requires new teachers to dig into the depths of their background and channel those experiences into meaningful classroom discourse. Any new experience requires an individual to draw upon the past to gain perspective and relate current knowledge to the new contexts or situations. Consequently, the ability to effectively recall and incorporate life experiences can help the pre-service teacher relate current incidents to past ones.

Several participants identified their participation and involvement in youth organizations such as FFA and 4-H as useful for gaining skills and experiences that can be applied to teaching contexts. "I was really active in 4-H before FFA and as I got high school age, I became a junior leader and was a project leader with little kids, those [experiences] will help with teaching." Preservice teachers also indicated FFA involvement as integral in leading them toward their intended career path. One teacher indicated, "I had a very good experience in FFA and the ag ed program...so [teaching] was a natural fit for me...I liked the interaction with [the] type of student involved in the ag ed world." Another student described her calling to education being channeled to agricultural education "I've had this planned out since I was in third grade...I wanted to be a teacher. Then I got into ag and I cadet taught [with] my ag teacher, that was a lot of fun and [I] kinda fell into it there." These preservice teachers related the many positive aspects within youth programs in helping them decide to enter the teaching profession.

Preservice teachers also discussed how challenges they faced in the 4-H and FFA environments provided experiences allowing them to develop characteristics of resilience. The teachers often indicated a perspective-shift on these experiences from being solely challenging to later recognizing them as initiators of personal growth and resilience building. "Being brought up in 4-H and FFA...you've always got challenges there...whether it's showing or preparing a demonstration or running for offices...I just worked through [the challenges] and didn't even realize it [at the time]." One other participant reflected, "Senior year, when I ran for state office...and didn't get it...that was the first thing that I had to deal with that I didn't get that I really tried to get...looking back on it now...it's probably a good thing that I didn't have it."

Resilience and the desire to teach were developed through educational experiences with younger children, especially siblings. Participants described these experiences as instrumental in preparing them to become teachers. The preservice teachers could all recount warm and positive experiences in mentoring younger students and/or siblings in their youth. One preservice teacher recalled; "When I'm helping my younger brother learn something, it's probably the happiest, I mean whenever I see he's getting it and if I can see that in my students, I think that's about all the gratitude I'm ever going to need." Another participant detailed his role as an older sibling as instrumental in helping him to understand different learning styles.

I have five younger siblings, and three of them I practically helped raise because I was so much older...I did more work around the house with the kids...I know how to work with them. I like...helping my little brother, trying to learn stuff on the farm. He gets frustrated pretty easily, so I think that's helped me know how to work through that kind of stuff with him, if I ever have a kid who has that problem, I'll know what to do...at least help him get through that.

Others had more formal experience with youth education through youth organizations and cadet teaching experiences. "I baby[sat]...a boy and a girl all the time that lived right down the road and then in high school I was a teacher's aide for a couple classes, one of them was a first grade class." Many of the preservice teachers indicated beneficial experiences in more than one youth organization setting. "My first experiences probably would be through FFA. Starting at the area officer level, doing workshops. Then through National FFA as an Ag Ambassador so not necessarily the classroom teaching, but more of the workshop environment."

Across the board, the preservice teachers described seeking out opportunities to work with youth in an educational context in a wide array of settings.

All through high school with my church I did peer mentoring and tutoring so I've always worked with younger kids. Then my second year here, I taught at [an after school program for at-risk youth] and I volunteered at the boys and girls club here my first three years [of college].

The preservice teachers responses to questions regarding resilience and motivation in becoming an educator elicited an observation of the vocation of educator as a calling more than a conscious choice. Each teacher described a trend of finding himself or herself serving in educational roles or within a variety of educational context from their childhood days to the present. Interestingly, experience within a variety of educational contexts did not seem to translate into confidence in preservice teachers' knowledge regarding the day-to-day mechanics of the job of a teacher. This phenomenon led to the next theme of uncertainty of the reality of the job.

### **The uncertainty of the reality of the job could counter resilience**

This second theme addresses the second and third research questions integrating the qualities of resilience possessed by the teachers and their concerns and thoughts about student teaching. The cloud of uncertainty hovering in the weeks before student teaching was evident in responses to career and professional intentions. This uncertainty ranged from work/life balance, creation of self-identity, and a perspective on the profession. One teacher captured the sentiments of this particular group in her comment, "[My biggest concern is]...figuring out what type of lesson plans or what type of activities work for those kids, because we can play pretend [in methods courses] but I know it's going to be totally different when you have kids every day."

The demands placed on agricultural educators through the many components of the program led to a questioning of ability in coping with what lies ahead by the preservice teachers. One participant directly stated, "I'm worried about burnout." Even though each participant had nearly completed all required teacher preparation courses and experiences, many discussed being generally unclear of what to expect from student teaching. "I just really don't...know...but I feel like I don't know what I'm getting into...I mean it's not to say I'm not excited about doing it...but...what exactly is gonna be required?" Anticipation and foreshadowing was also expressed, "I'm apprehensive about being an ag teacher because of balancing my personal life." Many teachers described an underlying anxiety regarding the difficulty of the job, especially as novices. "I'm afraid it's going to take a lot of time and I'm really apprehensive about those first couple year cause I know it's going to be difficult."

The preservice teachers described struggling and exploring their transitioning self-identities from college students, to student teachers, and finally to teachers.

I think the beginning of student teaching is going to be a little stressful, just getting in that every day routine. College is [different], you meet two days a week or you have three classes on this day and then work all day and only have one class. Then getting in the groove of figuring out what type of lesson plans or what type of activities work for those kids [will be difficult].

Across the board was found a common concern regarding the image of the teacher through the eyes of students and other adults in the school. Preservice teachers also expressed concern regarding their integration and acceptance from the communities where they were placed.

I want to make sure I work at fitting in the community and making sure I don't just get stuck doing what my cooperating teacher does and do my own thing, make it my own. I want to branch off from my cooperating teacher and kind of teach in my own style.

Related to their concerns about developing into a teacher, another aspect of image and identity the participants wrestled with the image students had of them, especially in regards to respect:

I think the biggest concern is the credibility with high school students, only being four years ahead of them. I think they may see me as older. I think I might feel like I'm closer to their age than they think I am. And honestly, it sounds kind of silly, I'm a smaller guy a lot of my students are going to be taller than me so that's a disadvantage I have and getting past that too.

In light of an uncertain job market, the enticement of employment within the agriculture industry sector creates a dilemma for someone nearing graduation.

I really want to teach, but when I first started there was a little side of me that wanted to work in industry. I'm about 99% sure that I want to teach, but if a job doesn't come open, I would go to industry.

Many of preservice teachers detailed their passion for agricultural education, but still resisted making their career decisions by holding teaching at an arm's length. One teacher discussed developing a perspective on the profession, "I want to see how student teaching goes before I decide if [teaching] is something I want to do long term." Regardless of uncertainty surrounding the student teaching experience, the early years of teaching, and the profession of agricultural education, the preservice teachers expressed a universal concern of ensuring they were delivering quality education to students and being effective teachers. This observation could be summed up with the phrase "doing a good job" used in the next theme.

### **Belief that "doing a good job" is key to resilience in teaching**

This theme precipitated from the third and fourth research questions relating preservice teachers' concerns and questions about student teaching to the resilience strategies utilized. While the majority of the participants were outwardly positive and optimistic about moving into their student teaching experiences, generally their uncertainty paralleled their concern for performing efficaciously. Preservice teachers indicated a dawning awareness of reality of the experience, pointing to the actuality of having students in their charge. "I'm not gonna be teaching just names on a piece of paper...you know...I'm gonna actually be teaching people."

Preservice teachers had a grave concern of the transition that would occur as they entered and exited their teaching sites, they expressed worry over students having a difficult time with the transitions and not performing up to the level of their host teacher.

I don't want to be a drastic change from the way [host teacher] teaches it to them to the way I teach it. I know we do we have our individual ways of doing it but I want it to still be [in line with] her curriculum. That way it doesn't throw off that class students later on when she [takes over].

Many of the preservice teachers expressed admiration of their host teacher and the desire to emulate his/her practices. "She works really well with students, always has interactive things. I would like to get some ideas from her about how to interact students and want students to be active in my class too no matter what the content is."

Discussion regarding challenges and concerns elicited unease regarding technical competence related to curriculum from the preservice teachers. One teacher voiced concern over, "being able to give my students accurate information and for them to have confidence in me that I'm teaching them what they need to know to be successful."

Also surfaced often was a concern regarding ability to deconstruct concepts and ensuring students received all necessary information. "The most challenging thing I think is getting the content to the students where they comprehend it, and making sure I hit all the points and give them factual information." The question of respect and authority in the teacher-student relationship was also surfaced in relation to efficacy with implications for motivation as well, "Will the students actually pay attention to me [and] sit there long enough, even though I plan on doing a lot of activities?" Gaining student respect as a component of doing a good job was often described as a very grey area possessing a fine line between being too overbearing and too easygoing. "I'd want them to respect me and

be able to come to me after class if they have problem, but not cross that student-teacher line. There's a definite line." Preservice teachers identified that not achieving a good balance of respect and caring could hinder student motivation. "I see the teachers that are all about the respect and making sure they're known as the teacher. At the same time, they don't ever bridge that gap a little bit and so they alienate students."

Initiating and maintaining high school student motivation and engagement was cause for concern. "[I] want to make it interesting for the students so they'll stay motivated to learn, just coming up with different ways to get them involved." Pre-service teachers' quest for quality teaching and student engagement expanded to their awareness of diverse learning needs. "I know I'll have students that will not learn the same way, so making that lesson plan that will get everyone learning and on the same page."

Although participants described areas of their personal and professional skill sets needing improvement, preservice teachers were generally positive and optimistic about their upcoming student teaching experiences. Optimism as a key to resilience in teaching was poignantly illustrated by one teacher:

I just think that the want and need to do better and to get better is what helps you stay positive. If you know things aren't going well, it's easy to get down and you just have to realize [you] need to do something different, then you work to do that to see the results.

Preservice teacher concern surrounding the concept of "doing a good job" was obviously at the forefront of their minds when they were thinking about the upcoming student teaching experience. Through the vignettes presented, concerns related to student motivation, teaching methods, transitioning, and obtaining student respect were found to be common threads for the teachers. However, regardless of their concerns, the teachers indicated an overall attitude of optimism as they were looking forward to the upcoming semester of student teaching.

When stepping back and examining these three themes in concert: *youth experiences are a key component toward reflection on resilience, the uncertainty of the reality of the job could counter resilience, and belief that "doing a good job" is key to resilience in teaching*; a portrait of the preservice teachers participating in the study could be developed. As they are moving toward their student teaching internships, these preservice teachers carry with them a host of rich experiences related to the education of youth. However, they may have found difficulty in properly accessing vignettes from these experiences on a cognitive level for integration into their practice. The preservice teachers also brought with them concerns regarding their abilities and uncertainty about their fit with the profession. In addition, these teachers brought an overwhelming desire to truly perform to the best of their ability for positive student outcomes may be realized.

## Discussion

A positive student teaching experience has been linked to the success of a new teacher as the most important experience completed through the teacher development program (Borne & Moss, 1990; Harlin, Edwards, & Breirs, 2002). Prior to the student teaching internship, when asked to reflect on specific components of resilience, the preservice teachers often recounted key experiences from youth. To encourage conscious thought regarding resilience, teacher educators can integrate reflection on specific prior knowledge of youth experiences in pedagogical content knowledge courses (Cruickshank et al., 1996; Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). This practice would be very much in line with the "Active Agent" model of educator resilience, whereby reflection provides a vehicle for teachers to adapt and change to the challenges they face (Castro et al. 2010). With an increasing number of non-traditional students entering the agricultural education program at the University of Missouri, strength in early field experiences is essential to build these experiences that may be lacking in some students. These early field experiences should include a



wide range of program types and styles of teachers to provide the preservice teacher with a wider view of what an agriculture program is and the daily job of the agriculture teacher. Maintaining a teacher development program that is strong in authentic experiences and utilizes authentic materials in coursework is essential to the success of all preservice teachers, regardless of their background in agriculture (Cruickshank et al., 1996).

Preservice teachers felt adequately prepared for the content knowledge demands that would be placed on them while teaching in the classroom and laboratory. However, many expressed uncertainty regarding their ability to relate their content knowledge and relevant personal experiences to their students in an effective manner consistent with previous findings (Anderson et al., 2012; Mundt & Connors, 1999). This indicates the importance of building a cognitive network in problem solving skills through strengthening the teachers' abilities to recall prior experiences and activate previous knowledge. For future research, the investigators ask if this reflection of experiences in youth is unique to agriculture teachers, or would this also be a component of reflection for preservice teachers in other academic disciplines?

In the second theme, the teachers expressed concern and uncertainty regarding the reality of the job and even indicated this as a factor that could counter educator resilience. It is imperative that teacher development programs prepare future teachers for the expectations and demands of the profession (Wardlow & Osborne, 2010). This theme supports the notion that earlier and more frequent field experiences are integral to teacher education (Miller & Wilson, 2010). Through authentic experiences early in the program, the teachers have the potential to develop a more global and realistic perception of the job of the agricultural educator. The ultimate implication for this theme is that there is no replacement for field experiences like student teaching as a vital component of the process of developing perspective on the profession and ultimately determining if agricultural education is a good fit for the individual.

The third theme should inspire teacher educators with hope that students leave our program with a disposition that "doing a good job" for students is essential. In light of this theme, the teacher educators at this institution should reflect on the specific components that emerged as defining a "good job." For consideration is the question of how to best capitalize on this "student-first" thinking that is displayed in the semester prior to student teaching? For future research is the inquiry: Do teachers exit student teaching with this same focus on quality and student-first disposition? If these components are parallel to the teacher education program philosophy, it is indicative that students have effectively built a framework that supports this philosophy.

When looking at the larger picture of the findings of this study, the researchers recommend teacher educators have a clear statement regarding the views of the program in relation to the model of teacher education being followed. This point brings about a question highly debated by agricultural education teacher educators regarding the weight that should be placed on general knowledge, content area knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge: Where should the focus of the agricultural education teacher education program be? In this study, preservice teachers were highly concerned about possessing enough content knowledge in the subjects they were going to teach. Through the course of study at the University of Missouri, students have been generally prepared in the main sectors of agriculture found in the state, however they still expressed concern regarding their preparation and level of knowledge.

Agricultural education is unlike any other content area found in the secondary setting in that courses and content vary widely from school to school to accommodate the needs and goals of the community in which the school is situated. This begs the question for the profession of agricultural education at large to consider: Should agricultural education teacher education be preparing content experts or should the focus lie more on pedagogical content knowledge? The current generation of preservice teachers and students in secondary classrooms have access to more information and knowledge than has ever been possible. Should we focus their education on knowing of content or developing skills in accessing and discerning the quality of content available? As researchers in agricultural teacher education, we are called to determine what is best

for our future teachers based on what their future classrooms will be rather than assuming the philosophy “what worked for us will work for them” in regard to teacher preparation.

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